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The Context and Content of
Social Identity Threat

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The concept of threat has occupied a central position in much psychological
theorizing. It does, however, continue to be a controversial construct for both
conceptual and methodological reasons. At the theoretical level, there has been
considerable variation in how threat has been defined within various research
traditions and the level of identity at which it is assumed to operate. Empirically,
threat induction has resulted in diverse consequences. Furthermore, because of
its potentially reactive nature, the operation of threat has often been inferred
from its effects on a variety of factors rather than via direct assessment, resulting
in interpretational difficulties. Our main focus in this chapter will be on distin-
guishing the different forms that identity threat can take, particularly those oper-
ating in intergroup contexts, but we will return to concerns of measurement in
the concluding section.

Research, especially that stemming from a Freudian (1930) conception of devel-
opment, has often considered threat in strictly personal identity terms. As part of
the authoritarian personality syndrome (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson &
Sanford, 1950), it was expected that individuals would experience chronic feel-
ings of threat to the extent that they were recipients of rigid and harsh treatment
during their formative years. As a result of the growing feelings of hostility and
inadequacy that were produced by such experiences, people might display defen-
sive derogation of devalued social groups. In a similar vein, frustration–aggression
theory (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer & Sears, 1939) explained the occurrence
of prejudice and discrimination by suggesting that the frustration resulting from
the failure to satisfy some personal need would be displaced onto specific scape-
goats, such as minority-group members. Likewise, realistic group conflict theory
(Sherif, 1966) proposed that conflicts between social groups arose because of
individuals' instrumental concerns (see Spears, Oakes, Ellemers & Haslam, 1997).

This approach suggested that threat results when people's personal interests are jeopardized because their group has to compete with other groups for scarce resources.

Similar predictions concerning who is most likely to be responsive to threat can be found in more recent social psychological research, where a number of studies have assessed whether people who differ in their levels of personal self-esteem also differ in their likelihood of engaging in outgroup derogation (Crocker, Thompson, McGraw & Ingerman, 1987; Hogg & Sunderland, 1991; Pelham, 1991; Tice, 1991). Although it has been demonstrated that even short-term or transient threats to personal self-esteem can elicit derogation of outgroup members (e.g., Meindl & Lerner, 1984), this literature is characterized by substantial inconsistencies in terms of the empirical findings. Indeed, recent reviews of this research have concluded that manipulation and measurement of self-esteem in a strictly personal sense are ill-suited to inform us about the likely responses of those whose group-based self-esteem is threatened (see Long & Spears, 1997; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998).

Thus, while there is a variety of forms of temporary and chronic threat to the individual's personal identity that have been investigated (Higgins, 1987, for a review), what has not been systematically examined are the different classes of threat that can be experienced at the social identity level. To the extent that previous theoretical and empirical work has considered social identity threat (see Breakwell, 1986), it has mainly addressed what we will call threats to the value of a group identity or its distinctiveness, as well as various strategies people may use to cope with these kinds of threat. In this chapter we delineate a taxonomy of four distinct classes of social identity threat, incorporating the different kinds of threat that can be implied in the relation between the individual and the social group. Although certain examples might touch on more than one class of threat, we believe this taxonomy has conceptual utility in clarifying the primary differences among them. These classes of identity threat can be distinguished as follows (see table 2.1 for a summary of the expected effects following each type of identity threat):

1   'Categorization threat' (being categorized against one's will).
2   'Distinctiveness threat' (group distinctiveness is prevented or undermined).
3   'Threats to the value of social identity' (the group's value is undermined).
4   'Acceptance threat' (one's position within the group is undermined).

With this classification scheme, we will be able to describe the most common social contexts in which each kind of threat is likely to be encountered or induced, and how the content of the resulting social identity determines the nature of this threat. In line with a central theme of the volume, we further argue that different classes of response are likely to be exhibited by people who vary in the degree to which they feel committed to a particular social group.

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Table 2.1   Responses by low and high identifiers to different kinds of threat

Class of threat	Who is likely to respond?	Type of response
Categorization	Low identifiers	Stress ingroup heterogeneity
		Further disidentification
		Stress unique personal qualities
	High identifiers	None
Distinctiveness	Low identifiers	Perceive groups at superordinate level
	High identifiers	Display outgroup derogation
		Perceive ingroup homogeneity
		Increased self-stereotyping
Value		
(a) Competence	Low identifiers	Further disidentification
	High identifiers	Display outgroup derogation
		Perceive ingroup homogeneity
		Increased self-stereotyping
(b) Morality	Low identifiers	Undo morally objectionable behaviour
	High identifiers	Defensive reactions
		Perceive ingroup heterogeneity
Acceptance	Low identifiers	None
	High identifiers	Display outgroup derogation
		Sliming (to attain acceptance)

Categorization Threat

Because social categorization involves the assignment of stereotypical group charac-
teristics to individual group members, it is possible that self-esteem may be affected,
and that the process of categorizing people into groups could constitute a social
identity threat (see Lemyre & Smith, 1985, for an early statement of this argument).
First, there is a whole host of social situations in which people expect to interact
primarily on an interpersonal basis and wish to be judged in terms of their personal
characteristics or merits (e.g., in an employment interview or when making new
friends). If, in such a situation, they are categorized in terms of their group member-
ship and they are primarily treated in terms of their gender, their ethnic background
or their political orientation, for example, then people may resist it and consider the
situation to be unjust. Indeed, in this case, they are likely to feel that they are victims
of prejudice in the sense that they are being prejudged in terms of their category
membership rather than being seen as a unique individual.

Such resistance to being categorized is likely to be particularly strong when the membership category seems irrelevant or illegitimate given the situation at hand (e.g., gender, when applying for a business loan), even if it is a social category the person would otherwise identify strongly with. Recent empirical research, for instance, has revealed that women in leadership positions tend to emphasize that they are different from other women (Ellemers, 1993a) and indicate that a gender categorization is irrelevant in this context (Rojahn, 1996). In many social contexts, people might even choose not to reveal a stigmatized or group membership if such costs of being categorized could be avoided entirely. However, to the extent that some defining group features (such as gender or ethnicity) are evident from people's physical appearance, they cannot hide their group affiliation and hence cannot prevent others from categorizing them in terms of this group membership (see also Crocker & Major, 1989).

It is also the case that every individual could be potentially categorized in many different ways, and people might prefer to be considered in terms of certain social groups (e.g., their political orientation) rather than other group memberships (e.g., their ethnic background). Whether or not people are willing to be categorized in terms of a particular group membership is likely to depend on their level of identification with or commitment to that particular group relative to their involvement with another, competing categorization. Empirical work on cross-categorization (Vanbeselaere, 1991), subtyping (Weber & Crocker, 1983), superordinate categorization (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell & Dovidio, 1989) and multiple categorizations (Macrae, Bodenhausen & Milne, 1996; Stangor, Lynch, Duan & Glass, 1992) has demonstrated that people can and do use different social categories to classify the same target of social judgement. While such factors as cognitive accessibility and comparative or normative fit determine which of several different possible categorizations is likely to be used (see also Oakes, 1987), the bulk of the existing work on this issue has focused on how detached perceivers categorize social stimuli that are external to the self. It remains to be seen, however, the extent to which similar or different cognitive and motivational processes are operative when people's own self-categorization is at stake (see also Ellemers & Van Knippenberg, 1997; Smith & Zarate, 1992). Some preliminary work comparing different bases for categorization suggests that people are more likely to feel committed to groups that they self-select than to those that are externally imposed, and that they generally identify more with small face-to-face groups than with large encompassing social categories (Branscombe, Spears, Ellemers. & Doosje, 1998; Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwerkerk, 1999). However, further research is necessary in order to assess systematically the conditions under which certain self-categorizations are more likely to be favoured than others.

In order to understand the implications of such categorization threats, looking at self-perceived group memberships alone is not enough. This is because the threat stems from the very fact that people's preferred self-categorizations do not correspond to the way they are perceived by others (see Long & Spears, 1997). In fact, Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested that, when consensual category designa-

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tions are applied by others, unless they are actively resisted, they may ultimately come to determine the way people perceive and define themselves (see also Tajfel, 1984). Although it is not self-evident whether and how the experience of such threats can be assessed directly, there is some suggestive evidence from recent empirical work that is relevant to this issue.

Other things being equal, we would expect low identifiers with a given social category to be the most resistant to such categorization, especially when it is explicitly imposed. Spears and Doosje (1996) showed that enhancing the salience of a categorization increases the tendency for low identifiers to distance themselves from the imposed categorization. Specifically, in research using the 'who said what' category-confusion paradigm (Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff & Ruderman, 1978), it was shown that participants who identified weakly with their group (i.e., psychology students) were less likely to categorize themselves as a group and were more likely to individuate group members, especially when they were forced to think in terms of the social categorization (see chapter 3 for further details).

Other research concerned with personal and collective self-esteem supports the idea that when internal and external categorizations are inconsistent or incompatible, defensive reactions can result. For example, research by Long and Spears (1997; see also Long & Spears, in press; Long, Spears & Manstead, 1994) proposed that people with the combination of low public collective self-esteem and high personal self-esteem might be particularly likely to be threatened by group categorization. This is because low public collective self-esteem represents an acknowledgement that one belongs to a group that is not valued by others, a situation that may be most threatening for people high in personal self-esteem. Because such people tend to define themselves in terms of their positive personal characteristics, they may therefore see themselves as being 'dragged down' by a negative group. Consistent with this increased threat hypothesis is the finding that a mismatch between personal and collective self-esteem levels can result in lowered identification with the group and this stems from reduced feelings of prototypicality and increased perceived distance from the group norm (Spears, Jetten & Van Harreveld, 1998).

Likewise, when high-performing individuals are included in a group that is low in status or that has received a negative evaluation, disidentification is likely to result (see Ellemers, Van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1990; Ellemers, Wilke & Van Knippenberg, 1993), and attempts to dissuade an audience of the applicability of that group membership for the self may occur. Those who lack an internal sense of commitment to the group, in particular if face-to-face interaction is lacking or unlikely so that ingroup repercussions can be avoided (see also chapter 6), may be tempted to distance themselves from the group or even 'put down' other ingroup members (see Ellemers, Van den Heuvel & De Gilder, 1996). Disidentification and discrediting the ingroup might be undertaken for the purpose of ingratiation with a higher status outgroup, especially in front of an outgroup audience (see also Ellemers, Van Dyck, Hinkle & Jacobs, 1998; Noel, Wann & Branscombe, 1995).

The intensity and type of emotion that is likely to be experienced when it is

obvious that others have categorized the self according to a particular group membership will depend on a number of factors. Anger or other forms of distress such as depression may be exhibited primarily by those who are low in identification, especially if they are highly likely to be categorized in this way by others. Again, such affective responses following involuntary categorization might stem either from the belief that it is inappropriate to perceive individuals in terms of any category membership in that particular context (e.g., personal qualities should be the only basis of judgement), or because the persons so categorized do not think of themselves in terms of that particular group membership at all. To the extent that people feel they are treated unjustly as a result of such inappropriate categorization, they are not only likely to express anger, but they may also suffer from lowered self-esteem (see Koper, Van Knippenberg, Bouhuijs, Vermunt & Wilke, 1993; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992).

Some suggestive evidence for the argument that categorization per se may have threatening affective consequences was obtained in a study by Van Rijswijk and Ellemers (1998). In this work, female students first completed a questionnaire to assess the extent to which they identified with their gender category. They were next presented with false information either indicating that women generally do worse than men at university, or that women generally do better, and they were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced four positive (happiness, satisfaction) or negative (anger, disappointment) emotions as a result. While they received and responded to this information, participants' level of physiological arousal was assessed by measuring their skin conductance.

In this study, self-reported emotional responses, corresponding to the valence (evaluative direction) of the group-relevant feedback, were more pronounced among those participants who identified more strongly with their group (see also Branscombe & Wann, 1992). However, results with the physiological measure yielded a different pattern. From the skin conductance data, it turned out that, regardless of the valence of the information, participants were more aroused after having received the group-relevant feedback showing that they identified less with their gender group than do other women. Van Rijswijk and Ellemers explained this latter finding by arguing that the higher levels of arousal observed in low-identifying group members might stem from the threat they experienced from being addressed as members of a group they chose not to identify with, a response that was not assessed by the four emotion terms that were used. This post-hoc explanation should be tested more explicitly in further research, although the results converge with the general notion that people may feel threatened when they are categorized against their will.

Involuntary categorization might be especially threatening in a context where that group membership implies poor ability or performance. Accordingly, only those who feel strongly committed to their devalued social category should be willing to self-stereotype as members of that group (see Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). Further evidence that people resist being categorized under these circumstances was obtained in a study by Doosje, Spears and Koomen (1995). Members

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of experimental groups who were confronted with a better performing outgroup emphasized the heterogeneity of these two groups, presumably as an attempt to render the categorization less meaningful or diagnostic for themselves (see also Doosje, Spears, Ellemers & Koomen, 1999; chapter 6, this volume).

As Steele's (1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995) work has illustrated, categorization based on a poorly performing group may actually harm people's own perform-ances. Specifically, when Black American students think that they are likely to be categorized in terms of their racial group membership, their performance on di-mensions on which their group has historically fared poorly suffers. The extra burden of being seen as representative of one's group and the possible confirma-tion of the negative group stereotype appear to impede performance on verbal tests (a dimension on which there is stereotype vulnerability for this group; Steele, 1997; see also chapter 9, this volume). When Black Americans do not believe that they have been categorized according to their racial group membership, but as-sume instead that they are simply completing a reading test, their performance is equivalent to that of White Americans. Whether there might be psychological benefits to be gained by recategorizing the self in terms of an alternative group membership which is less subject to evaluation threat in such circumstances awaits future research.

Thus, as we have described, simply being categorized as a member of a group may be a threatening experience. For some, it is because they do not identify with that group in the first place, and for others it is because the group membership seems inappropriate for the context. In other instances categorization is threaten-ing in part because of the nature of the group categorization itself. It might be a group from which the individual derives little self-esteem, in contrast to the positivity of their personal self. Or, it might be a group membership for which self-esteem is at stake, but it is socially devalued to such an extent that the individual so catego-rized is vulnerable to confirming that group's performance expectancies.

Distinctiveness Threat

In the previous section we considered the problems of dealing with a contextually undesirable social categorization. In this section we wish to consider what is in many senses the opposite concern—namely, the threat associated with not having a distinct social identity, or one that is insufficiently distinctive from other compari-son groups. Starting with Tajfel's seminal work on categorization and perceptual accentuation effects (Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963), social identity theory has empha-sized the idea that people use social categories to structure their social environ-ment and to define their own place therein (see Tajfel, 1969, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social categories therefore help to provide us with meaningful identities, which allow us to make sense of our world (Tajfel, 1974, 1978a). More recently, self-categorization theory (Turner, 1987) has further developed the no-

tion that people may actively use and enhance the meta-contrast (a measure of the distinctiveness of groups from each other) as a meaning-seeking device, in order to delineate more clearly our position in the social environment. Social identity theory also introduces an explicitly socio-motivational element driving a quest for group distinctiveness. Given that we derive part of our self-esteem from our social identities and positive social comparisons with other groups, it follows that social comparison with similar outgroups could threaten group distinctiveness and social identity.

According to this analysis, threats to identity associated with group distinctness can probably be broken down into two closely related aspects, which are complementary rather than competing. First, possessing a distinct and meaningful social identity may be functional in itself, for it provides a basis for action (see also Baumeister, 1986, for similar arguments in relation to personal identity). Second, once a distinct group identity is established, social comparison with similar groups can be potentially threatening to group distinctiveness. In short, the motivation to possess a 'distinct' social identity may be a prerequisite for, although it can be distinguished from, the quest for group 'distinctiveness', which is most likely to be at issue in the intergroup context. Below, we address each of these related aspects in turn.

Spears and Jetten (1998a) examined the ability of a categorization to furnish the meaning implied by a distinctive social identity in line with the earlier ideas of Tajfel (1969). The argument proposed was that if a social categorization already provides people with a distinct and meaningful identity, then differentiation and discrimination as typically experienced by minimal groups may not be necessary. This idea was tested in an experiment where people were categorized according to the minimal group paradigm (preference for Painter A versus Painter B in the 'minimal' condition). A further condition was added to the basic minimal one, however, stating that the preference for one painter over the other was said to be related to personality type, namely extroversion versus introversion (the 'maximal' or 'meaningful' condition). Whereas discrimination on the Tajfel matrices was significant in the minimal condition, it was reduced and non-significant in the meaningful. Moreover, these differences were unrelated to measures of uncertainty (e.g., Mullin & Hogg, 1998) and so cannot easily be explained as serving uncertainty reduction in any generic sense, which has been proposed as a basic purpose of differentiation and discrimination. Rather, these findings are consistent with the view that social categorization, especially when embellished with meaningful content, can provide a distinct identity for its members. Further attempts to achieve additional differentiation by discrimination may then become superfluous. Thus, only when the meaning or content of a group identity is not sufficiently clear or distinct (e.g., in minimal groups) will differentiation be used to enhance group distinctness.

It is interesting to note that Tajfel (1978a, p. 42) considered minimal groups to be 'maximal' in the sense that the minimal group context is stripped of all interpersonal contact and context: the group is the only identity made available to the

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participants in this situation and discrimination is perhaps the only means available to them for asserting group identity (see also Spears, 1995). The anonymity and 'depersonalization' associated with the minimal group paradigm may also, however, provide the most fertile conditions for increased group salience. In line with the social identity model of deindividuation effects, increased intergroup discrimination has been found in this paradigm (Reicher, Spears & Postmes, 1995; Spears, 1995a; Spears & Lea, 1994: see also chapters 6 and 8, this volume). Nevertheless, minimal groups do remain minimal in terms of the content of group identity, and, as the study by Spears and Jetten suggests, embellishing this content may abrogate the need for more active differentiation. Indeed, at times, the content of a group identity may even explicitly proscribe discrimination (see chapter 5), helping to explain why differentiation and discrimination in natural social groups are not universal, as the minimal group literature might suggest they should be.

Yet, there is also clear evidence based on more established groups that a distinct and meaningful group identity is important. Indeed, possession of a distinct identity may be even more important than having a positive identity. Evidence of this was provided by a study involving Dutch and Polish students, where it was demonstrated that the desire for ingroup distinctness could override the concern for a positive group image (Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996). Specifically, among Polish students, for whom establishing a distinct national identity was of paramount importance, the negative nature of characteristic national traits was emphasized as a means of enabling them to derive a distinct national identity rather than emphasizing similarity to other European countries with respect to positive national traits. In a laboratory study using students from the University of Amsterdam, Doff (1998) further showed that when their social identity was threatened by an unfavourable comparison with a rival outgroup (i.e., students from the Free University), high but not low identifiers were more likely to stereotype their group on negative but stereotypic dimensions (e.g., 'sloppy'). In short, the importance of having a meaningful and distinct social identity may well outweigh the fact of its negativity, especially for those who strongly identify with that group.

The importance of group distinctness leads directly to the issue of group distinctiveness in the intergroup context. Many theorists have pointed to the psychological consequences of group distinctiveness. However, distinctiveness has been conceptualized and operationalized in a number of different ways. Following social identity principles we have, thus far, emphasized the importance of the psychological boundedness of the group (group distinctness), which then logically implies its differentiation from other groups (intergroup distinctiveness). However, some previous research has conceived of group distinctiveness in more contextually specific ways. In particular, distinctiveness has been defined in terms of, first, the relative size or infrequency of the group (e.g., minority group status) and, second, the relative (dis)similarity of the two groups on some underlying content dimension. We consider below the social psychological implications of both these senses of distinctiveness in relation to the nature of the threat to identity that may be experienced.

Many theorists have analysed the cognitive effects of numerical distinctiveness (relative infrequency) in enhancing the salience of the group and endowing its members with a sense of uniqueness. The evidence supports the notion that people are more likely to perceive themselves spontaneously as members of numerically distinctive groups (McGuire, McGuire, Child & Fujioka, 1978; McGuire, McGuire & Winton, 1979; McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976) relative to majority groups. Similarly, Mullen (1991) has argued that numerical infrequency can form the basis of group salience. While, by their very nature, these kinds of cognitive factor can influence perceptions of distinctiveness, they cannot predict when distinctiveness will be undermined or why that would be threatening.

Other theoretical views have, however, included a more motivational component, which encompasses threats to group distinctiveness. Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) argues for a basic motivational need where people seek a certain degree of group distinctiveness as well as inclusion (see also Snyder & Fromkin, 1980, for a similar argument). This approach, in keeping with the socio-motivational basis of group distinctiveness that is incorporated into social identity theory, regards group distinctiveness not just as a source of salient identity, but as something that will be actively protected when threatened.

Simon and his colleagues (Simon, 1992a; see Simon & Brown, 1987; Simon & Hamilton, 1994) have also argued that people will typically identify more strongly with distinctive groups (i.e., minorities) than with non-distinctive ones (i.e., majorities). The fairly strong identification that can be observed in minority group members has been explained by the observation that there is a relatively large overlap between social and personal identity for minority group members, which is lacking for dominant group members (Simon, Pantaleo & Mummendey, 1995).

At the same time, however, minority groups are often seen as inferior to majority groups (e.g., Blanz, Mummendey & Otten, 1995; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1984). Consequently, it is commonly assumed that minority group membership will be experienced as unattractive, and may therefore constitute an identity threat in its own right. In many contexts and societies, the majority group will often have the political and economic power to define itself as better and not just as numerically dominant. Some recent research has explicitly addressed this issue, by varying numerical distinctiveness (relative size) and relative status (differential value) as independent group characteristics that could influence the extent to which people are willing to identify with a particular group (Ellemers, Doosje, Van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1992; Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwerkerk, 1998; Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997; Simon & Hamilton, 1994). These studies have consistently revealed that people are less willing to identify with majority than with minority groups, a finding that is in line with the notion that a lack of distinctiveness may constitute a threat to people's social identity. In addition, minority ingroup members have been shown to display greater ingroup bias than do majority group members, which may reflect the sense of threat that such lower status can bestow (e.g., Bettencourt, Miller & Hume, in press; Mullen, Brown & Smith, 1992).

There is now quite a considerable literature on the threats to distinctiveness

arising from intergroup comparisons with groups that are similar to the ingroup (Brown, 1984a, 1984b; Brown & Abrams, 1986; Henderson-King, Henderson-King, Zhermer, Posokhova & Chiker, 1997, Jetten, Spears & Manstead, 1997a; 1998a, 1998b; Marcus-Newhall, Miller, Holtz & Brewer, 1993; Moghaddam & Stringer, 1988; Roccas & Schwartz, 1993; Turner, 1978b). Much of this work has supported the social identity theory prediction that groups will try to differentiate themselves from other groups that are too similar to the ingroup and which, accordingly, threaten group distinctiveness. This pattern is most notable for high identifiers for whom that group identity is important and central (Henderson-King, Henderson-King, Zhermer, Posokhova & Chiker, 1997; Jetten, Spears & Manstead, 1998b; Roccas & Schwartz, 1993). Because low identifiers, by definition, are less likely to be threatened by undermined group distinctiveness, they are more likely to consider the distinction between their own and a similar outgroup as less crucial. Indeed, low identifiers may prefer to self-categorize at the individual level or at a more superordinate level which includes both groups (see chapter 5).

Threats to intergroup distinctiveness can be manifested and responded to in ways other than direct intergroup differentiation. In fact, direct differentiation may sometimes be difficult, especially if it contradicts the social reality of the similarity between the groups (see chapter 6). Alternative strategies may be more likely to be employed by high identifiers, such as that of defining themselves in terms of the group ("self-stereotyping') when group distinctiveness is threatened by a similar outgroup comparison. Two studies have supported this prediction for both low self-perceived and low externally perceived ingroup distinctiveness (Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; see also chapter 3, this volume). Results from both studies were consistent with the notion that a lack of group distinctiveness may constitute an identity threat. Specifically, while there was no difference between high- and low-identifying group members when the ingroup seemed distinct from the relevant outgroup (the no threat case), these two classes of individuals showed differential strategic responses to the threat posed by low ingroup distinctiveness.

While many researchers have focused on the relative ease with which people can be induced to show outgroup derogation or discrimination when distinctiveness is threatened, the more general theoretical point is that people tend to differentiate their groups in order to achieve or restore distinctiveness (and, as we have seen, not necessarily always positively). As we have suggested, ingroup favouritism may occur in an experimental setting where people are forced to assess or evaluate both groups in terms of a single comparative criterion, because this is the only option for achieving intergroup distinctiveness (see also Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983). However, empirical evidence has now accumulated demonstrating that multidimensional intergroup comparisons are likely to yield different results (see also Van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 1990, for a review). In these studies, the usual pattern that is observed is for members of both groups to reach a consensual agreement that certain traits or abilities are more characteristic of one group, while the other group is deemed to be superior on other complementary comparative dimensions (Ellemers,

Van Rijswijk, Roefs & Simons, 1997; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984b; Mummendey & Simon, 1989; Spears & Manstead, 1989; Van Knippenberg & Van Oers, 1984; Van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1979). Arguably, this is a desirable situation, as it enables members of both groups to maintain their own distinct identity (Van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 1990). In fact, it has been demonstrated that groups are likely actively to seek and propose additional comparative dimensions as a strategy for coping with a lack of positive group distinctiveness on the focal dimension (Lemaine, 1974; Van Knippenberg, 1978). Thus, the evidence suggests that increasing intergroup distinctiveness can actually reduce identity threat, with greater differentiation between groups diminishing ingroup bias (Deschamps & Brown, 1983), and improving intergroup relations (Brown & Wade, 1987).

Threats to Value

The notion that people will attempt to defend the value of an important group membership when it is directly attacked by an outgroup is derivable from the basic postulates of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). People can obtain or maintain positive feelings about their own group to the extent that a positive comparison with another group can be achieved. While different strategic responses are feasible (e.g., employment of social creativity strategies), exposure to a negative social comparison between the ingroup and a relevant outgroup may be perceived as sufficiently threatening to evoke ingroup favouritism and/or outgroup derogation as a means of defending that identity. In this section we further delineate the threat to a valued group membership by distinguishing between the source of the threat and the dimensions on which it can occur. The outgroup is often the 'object' of the identity threat, but it can also be the source in a more direct or active sense, such as when the threatening information or behaviour is intentionally directed at the ingroup by the outgroup. Sometimes the source is less explicit, however, with a third party generating the threat, or it may simply be activated based on a salient intergroup comparison (e.g., the group's poor performance, status or standing). Finally, and perhaps most unusual of all, the ingroup itself may be the source of the threat. That is, the domain of the evaluative difference between the groups may stem from the ingroup's prior actions or history. In particular, there may be an important distinction in terms of how threat will be experienced, depending on whether the difference between the groups is based on competence-related dimensions (e.g., performance, status) or those concerning morality (e.g., treatment of the outgroup). Reactions to such differing identity threats may depend on people's levels of identification with the group. We will begin by considering threats that stem directly from the outgroup, and then move on to cases where more neutral sources are operating, followed by instances where the ingroup itself plays a role.

A good demonstration of the hypothesis that threats to identity generated by an

outgroup can provoke ingroup favouritism is provided by Bourhis, Giles, Leyens and Tajfel (1979). In that research, Belgian Flemish speakers were exposed to an outgroup member (a French-speaking Belgian) who was insulting about the ingroup's language group membership. Compared with a control condition, where this threat to social identity was absent, the Flemish respondents who were exposed to the language group insult were more likely to retaliate with obscenities directed towards the offending French-speaking experimental confederate. Thus, explicit attacks on a social identity can directly evoke outgroup derogation.

Group-level defensive strategies are equally apparent when the threatening behaviour of the outgroup is more chronic and ingrained. In a study of African Americans, responses to perceptions of discrimination by White Americans were examined (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, in press). It was found that perceived discrimination across a variety of social situations predicted elevated minority group identification. Furthermore, the more Black Americans perceive themselves to be victims of racial discrimination, the more hostility towards Whites they exhibited. Thus, feeling discriminated against based on one's group membership encourages derogation of the rejecting outgroup member who does the discriminating (see also Crocker, Voelkl, Testa & Major, 1991), and psychological movement towards an accepting ingroup.

In a related vein, threats from an outgroup can also enhance self-affirmation (Steele, 1987) and self-stereotyping (see chapter 3). For example Dion (1986) reported that the more Jewish participants believed their Gentile evaluators were prejudiced against them, the more they described themselves as possessing positively evaluated stereotypic Jewish attributes. Such increased willingness to self-stereotype is suggestive of at least temporary increases in ingroup identification. More direct effects of this sort were obtained by Ellemers, Wilke, and Van Knippenberg (1993). They found that when people collectively suffered unjust treatment that resulted in low ingroup status (as opposed to the situation where they had been illegitimately categorized as a member of a lower status group), ingroup identification was strengthened, and increased intergroup competition occurred. When such outgroup-based threats to the ingroup's value in the form of discrimination and devaluation are severe enough, and the outgroup's penalties are not prohibitive, we would expect that most ingroup members would behave in this defensive fashion; closing ranks following explicit group-based exclusion allows devalued group members to protect their well-being (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, in press).

When the source of negative evaluation is less explicitly derived from the outgroup per se, threats to identity can be no less evident. In a further refinement of the basic social identity theory predictions concerning identity management under conditions of threat, Branscombe and Wann (1994) exposed American participants who were either high or low in identification with their national group to one of two short video presentations of a boxing match. One version of the video was expected to create a threat to the value of being an American by portraying the American athlete as a loser when compared to his Russian counterpart. The

other version was expected to support the value of being an American by portray-
ing the American boxer as beating the Russian and winning the match. Notice
that this manipulation did not involve a direct group membership insult, as the
Bourhis, Giles, Leyens and Tajfel (1979) study did; it was a considerably more
symbolic threat to identity. Yet, exposure to this implied inferiority of ingroup
manipulation, among those who identified strongly with Americans, did signifi-
cantly reduce their private feelings of collective self-esteem compared with when
the identity-supporting video was viewed. Such reductions in self-esteem as a func-
tion of degree of identity threat were not observed among the participants who
did not identify themselves strongly with the American. Furthermore, the degree
to which exposure to the identity threat harmed the collective self-esteem of the
highly identified predicted subsequent outgroup derogation. The amount of
outgroup derogation that was expressed was, in turn, linked with subsequent
positive self-esteem increases (see also Oakes & Turner, 1980).

This research illustrates how a threat to the value of a social identity is re-
sponded to differentially depending on how identified the individual is with a
specific social group. Not all group members respond to such value threats by
directly derogating the competing outgroup; only the highly identified respond
with outgroup derogation. Furthermore, the potential consequences of outgroup
derogation seems to be functional: for those who value the identity in question,
derogation of the threatening outgroup can serve collective self-esteem restoration
purposes.

In addition to direct outgroup derogation, when the ingroup is portrayed as 'less
than' a competing outgroup on valued dimensions, other more subtle types of de-
fensive responses can be exhibited. Social reality constraints may often limit the
credibility of direct ingroup favouritism, at least on the status-defining dimensions
(see chapter 6). In situations where the ingroup is portrayed as less successful than
the outgroup because of its own failure (e.g., when one's own sports team loses,
which can imply that the group as a whole is less valuable than previously thought)
rather than because of an 'unfair' bias against the ingroup on the part of the outgroup,
then only high identifiers are likely to display subtle collective responses as a means
of reinforcing or displaying their commitment to the group. These include perceiv-
ing the ingroup as more cohesive or homogeneous (Doosje, Ellemers & Spears,
1995; Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1997), seeing the self as more representative of
the ingroup (Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1997), and stereotyping the group on non-
status defining stereotypic attributes, both positive and negative (e.g., Doff, 1998;
Ellemers & Van Rijswijk 1997; see also Wann & Branscombe, 1990, 1993; and
chapter 9 this volume). These processes may provide individuals with a clear and
consensually agreed upon common group identity, which constitutes a first step
towards ingroup favouritism, outgroup derogation, and other forms of collective
resistance (see chapter 4). In this way, intergroup competition and defeat can elevate
ingroup cohesion and make other group-level responses more likely (Rothgerber,
1997; Turner, Hogg, Oakes & Smith, 1984; see chapter 3, this volume).

Such increasing alignment with the ingroup among high identifiers can encour-

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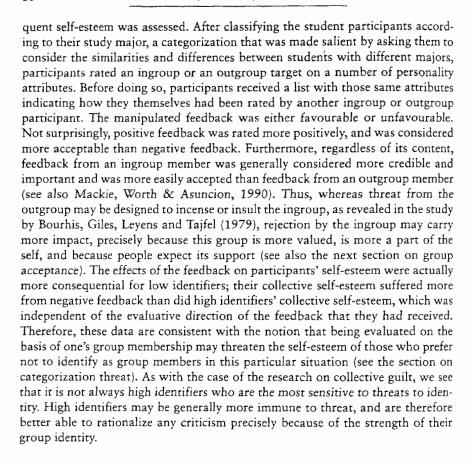ally sa
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age attempts to rationalize and defend the ingroup's actual performance history. This type of defensive response can even occur in members of groups with superior social standing, when the group's moral value is called into question, as has been observed among various natural social groups. With such responses, the focus is shifted from the dimension of competence or status to questions of morality and the nature of the intergroup relationship itself. Consider the dilemma experienced by highly identified White American participants who are reminded of the unearned privileges that they have obtained because of their racial group membership (Branscombe, Schiffhauer & Valencia, 1998). In response to this threat to the image of the ingroup, where it is implied that the ingroup has been unfair to and exploitive of the other group, high White identifiers exhibit significant increases in their scores on McConahay's (1986) 'modern racism' measure compared with a control condition where their racial ingroup is not portrayed in this threatening manner. Because highly identified Whites cannot or will not accept this exploitive portrait of their group's past, the need to rationalize the contextually salient differences in outcomes received by the two groups can be accomplished by reducing the deservingness of the outgroup. In contrast, the low identified White participants, when they are reminded of the privileges they have received because of their racial group membership, do not show increases in anti-Black sentiments. Instead, they exhibit significant reductions in self-esteem, presumably because they accept the 'unearned advantages' claim about their group's history as true (see also Branscombe, 1998, for a similar demonstration in relation to gender).

The tendency to defend the group's history among high identifiers, and the induction of negative group-based emotions in low identifiers, was demonstrated more explicitly in a set of studies which examined how Dutch participants responded when they were reminded of their nation's colonial history in Indonesia (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears & Manstead, 1998; see also chapter 4 this volume). These results show that when people belong to a particular group they are likely to react differentially when the group's value is threatened, depending on their degree of identification with the group. In fact, we would argue that identification with a group allows people to feel emotions as a consequence of the fate of that group and the actions of its members, even if they personally cannot be held responsible for the outcomes delivered by their group to the other group (see chapter 4 for further discussion of this issue). Thus, an important conclusion we draw from this work is that emotions may be experienced by group members when their social identity is salient, and that those emotions may be very different from what would be expected if they were operating on the basis of their personal identity. In addition, such group-based emotions can be powerful determinants of intentions for future actions towards the outgroup (see also chapter 10).

A study by Ellemers and Haaker (1995) examined the self-esteem consequences of identity threat when either the outgroup or the ingroup was the source of the threat among high and low group identifiers. Natural group members were rated either positively or negatively on the basis of their group membership and subse-

quent self-esteem was assessed. After classifying the student participants accord-
ing to their study major, a categorization that was made salient by asking them to
consider the similarities and differences between students with different majors,
participants rated an ingroup or an outgroup target on a number of personality
attributes. Before doing so, participants received a list with those same attributes
indicating how they themselves had been rated by another ingroup or outgroup
participant. The manipulated feedback was either favourable or unfavourable.
Not surprisingly, positive feedback was rated more positively, and was considered
more acceptable than negative feedback. Furthermore, regardless of its content,
feedback from an ingroup member was generally considered more credible and
important and was more easily accepted than feedback from an outgroup member
(see also Mackie, Worth & Asuncion, 1990). Thus, whereas threat from the
outgroup may be designed to incense or insult the ingroup, as revealed in the study
by Bourhis, Giles, Leyens and Tajfel (1979), rejection by the ingroup may carry
more impact, precisely because this group is more valued, is more a part of the
self, and because people expect its support (see also the next section on group
acceptance). The effects of the feedback on participants' self-esteem were actually
more consequential for low identifiers; their collective self-esteem suffered more
from negative feedback than did high identifiers' collective self-esteem, which was
independent of the evaluative direction of the feedback that they had received.
Therefore, these data are consistent with the notion that being evaluated on the
basis of one's group membership may threaten the self-esteem of those who prefer
not to identify as group members in this particular situation (see the section on
categorization threat). As with the case of the research on collective guilt, we see
that it is not always high identifiers who are the most sensitive to threats to iden-
tity. High identifiers may be generally more immune to threat, and are therefore
better able to rationalize any criticism precisely because of the strength of their
group identity.

Acceptance

Receiving negative feedback from the ingroup raises the question of acceptance by
one's own group and this constitutes our fourth class of identity threat. We now
consider threat pertaining to intragroup processes, albeit in an intergroup context.
Specifically, unwillingness on the part of the ingroup to accept the self as a group
member may be a source of threat to an ingroup member. One might be poten-
tially threatened with a lack of ingroup acceptance for a variety of reasons. In this
section we will focus on the threat associated with the uncertainty of group ac-
ceptance that may occur when trying to gain entry into a new group, on the one
hand, and when being excluded from an existing group on the other.
    In a number of social contexts, groups to which people strongly desire admit-
tance maintain strict requirements for prospective members. A certain set of skills

must be obtained or milestones passed (e.g., a high-level degree for academic promotion), a probationary period must be served (e.g., in trade unions; sororities and fraternities), or particular acts undertaken, which are often personally dangerous but can convey loyalty to the group (e.g., criminal acts in the Mafia or urban street gangs). It is commonly assumed that such initiation procedures, or 'rites of passage', serve as tests of the loyalty of prospective group members by the group's establishment, and they may enhance commitment to the group once individuals have actually gained group membership (see Aronson & Mills, 1959; Gerard & Mathewson, 1966), although these potentially beneficial effects of initiation severity have more recently been called into question (Lodewijkx & Syroit, 1997). We argue that while this class of threat may evoke similar responses to those resulting from a threat to the group as a whole (such as outgroup derogation), the motivation underlying such actions is fundamentally different.

A central component of self-categorization theory (Turner, 1987) is the notion that people can and do use expressive behaviour in order to indicate their preferred identity, and to act strategically in the service of their interests ('impression management'). Accordingly, research on attitude formation has demonstrated that people tend to adopt the position that is prototypical for the group they want to align themselves with. In fact, people may even express more extreme attitudes when this would serve as a means of differentiating the self from the position advocated by another group (Turner, 1991; Wetherell, 1987; see also chapters 6 and 8, this volume). As both Lewin (1948) and Tajfel (1978b) have argued, those who are marginal members of social groups are likely to experience an intrapsychic need to clarify what group he or she actually belongs to. An identity conflict situation of this sort might be most likely to arise in cases where the individual is a peripheral or non-prototypical member of two competing and incompatible group memberships. For example, Hispanic students, who are starting their first year at an Ivy League university, can either get involved in Hispanic activities on campus, or they may move away from their ethnic identity in order to integrate with the Anglo-Saxon students (see Ethier & Deaux, 1994). When one of the two social identity groups has greater social status than the other, attempts to 'pass' as a member of the higher status group may be a likely option. As a consequence, marginal group members are likely to devalue the lesser group as a means of convincing themselves, as well as other outgroup members, that they really are members of the more desirable ingroup.

Accordingly, we argue that those who feel uncertain about the extent to which others accept or recognize them as members of a particular group should display behaviour that is prototypical for members of the preferred group. Obviously, the specific content of this behaviour may vary, depending on the nature of the group, as well as the question of how it can be meaningfully differentiated from relevant comparison groups (see the section on distinctiveness threat and also chapter 5). Thus, people may display a variety of behaviours, ranging from physically hurting or even killing someone – for instance to get accepted as a member of a youth gang – to sponsoring the homeless as a means of getting accepted as a member of a

Rotary Club. However, the common denominator underlying these various be-
havioural displays is that, when facing uncertainty about acceptance into an ingroup
that is perceived to be desirable, people will try to present themselves to other
ingroup members as holding especially favourable and prototypical attitudes to-
wards the ingroup (see Noel, Wann & Branscombe, 1995). Indeed, the applicant
may publicly report being honoured even to be considered for membership in the
group (see also Vonk, 1998).

As a result of the operation of such processes, a generic norm in many intergroup
situations will involve favouring the ingroup and/or to derogating the outgroup.
For instance, in social dilemma situations, people appear to be more competitive
in intergroup contexts as opposed to interpersonal contexts (see Insko, Schopler,
Hoyle, Dardis & Graetz, 1990). In a similar vein, in a series of experiments,
Platow, Hoar, Reid, Harley and Morrison (1997) demonstrated that group mem-
bers are more likely to endorse a leader who accords them an unfair advantage in
intergroup situations, while fairness is clearly preferred in interpersonal decision
contexts. Furthermore, in line with our argument, the endorsement of ingroup-
favouring leadership behaviour appears to be more pronounced among those par-
ticipants who strongly identify with their group.

Thus, given that it is normative in social groups to view one's own group more
positively than a relevant comparison outgroup, at least on group-defining dimen-
sions, conforming to perceived ingroup expectations of this sort might seem to be
an effective means of securing greater acceptance on the part of more established
ingroup members. In fact, derogating the outgroup might even be a way of pub-
licly proclaiming admiration for the sought-after ingroup and of attempting to
improve one's own status within the group (see also chapter 6). This strategy was
evident in a study by Breakwell (1979). She tested the prediction that more outgroup
derogation would be expressed by individuals who had obtained admittance to
the group via illegitimate means than by people who had gained acceptance into
the group legitimately. Those who were aware that their membership in the desir-
able group was not secure (because they cheated to gain admittance to it) did in
fact display more extreme outgroup derogation than those who felt their member-
ship was secure. In this study, however, the extent to which this greater outgroup
derogation on the part of insecure group members served to clarify for themselves
which group they wanted to belong to, or was intended to convey their preferred
identity to others, remains ambiguous.

More conclusive evidence that outgroup derogation may be used for intragroup
ingratiation was obtained in a study where the individual's peripheral status was
explicitly related to the phase of seeking and achieving ingroup membership, and
participants were led to believe that other ingroup members either would or would
not learn about their responses (Noel, Wann & Branscombe, 1995, Study 2). In
this situation, outgroup derogation might be used as a means of providing con-
vincing evidence to established ingroup members that the applicant will abide by
the ingroup's norms and should be accepted as a true ingroup member. The study
illustrated how fraternity and sorority group members' trait assignments for ingroup

members and non-members exhibited a consistent ingroup bias, regardless of the context in which those judgements were expressed. However, among the pledges from those who had not yet been fully accepted into the group, the assignment of traits to ingroup and outgroup members was affected by the social context in which their attitudes were expressed. When these not-fully-accepted group members' trait ratings could be publicly monitored by established group members who had power over them, then outgroup derogation occurred and ingroup members were evaluated most positively. If, however, the insecure applicants to the organization believed that their ratings would not be made known to the ingroup's powerful establishment, they failed to differentiate between the ingroup and outgroup in their ratings. Thus, this research illustrates that outgroup derogation can function as a means of strategically addressing intragroup self-presentational concerns by peripheral group members.

So far, we have considered the effects of insecure group membership for those who are trying to gain access to a particular group (newcomers). However, similar concerns may be evoked when people who currently belong to the group are faced with the risk of possible exclusion from the ingroup, with responses to such actual or implied rejection depending on how important that identity is to the individual. In some instances, the threat is not that one will be literally stripped of group membership, but, rather, it concerns the extent to which one will be accepted as a 'good' or 'typical' group member. That is, people may fear that they will not receive full recognition of their group membership because of their non-prototypicality. For those who are low in identification, a reasonable response to such a situation might be to disidentify in anticipation of being rejected by the ingroup (see also chapter 3). In fact, a positive emotional response to non-prototypicality could even be imagined for those who are not identified with the group, because this implies that their self-categorization is better matched with the way they are perceived by the group (see also Spears, Jetten & Van Harreveld, 1998).

Those who are high in identification, however, should show similar responses to people who are trying to gain access from the periphery of the group, as we have discussed above. Consequently, they are likely to continue admiring those who are more prototypical of the group. In fact, if the ingroup is of sufficient importance to the individuals who are threatened by being non-prototypical, they might even display a willingness to evaluate more positively someone who is prototypical of the group compared with someone who is personally similar to them (i.e., is also not prototypical of the group). A recent study of men who were either high or low in identification with their gender group provides empirical evidence that group-protecting evaluation ratings occur in the highly identified, but not among those whose identification with the group is weak (Schmitt & Branscombe, 1997). Such responses occur when high group identification is coupled with a perceived threat to group membership. That is, when highly identified men were told they were not prototypical of their group, they more strongly favoured an ingroup target who was portrayed as prototypical and at the same time they devalued an ingroup

target who was non-prototypical. These results can be taken as quite compelling evidence of the high identifier's desire to protect the overall value of the group. Here they are willing to value someone who is apparently quite personally dissimilar to themselves but is a good representative of their valued group. This contrasts with the strong tendency, which has been observed in much social psychological research, to favour others who are similar to the self (Byrne, 1971; Griffin & Sparks, 1990). From a self-categorization perspective (Turner, 1987), however, the two forms of attraction exhibited by both the high and the low identifiers in this research are conceptually and empirically distinct. As Hogg and Hains (1997) have shown, social attraction of the sort observed among the highly identified males is indeed a function of level of identification with the group, while personal attraction would be a function of other strictly interpersonal variables.

In addition to not matching the ingroup prototype in terms of defining physical or psychological characteristics, people may be perceived as non-prototypical and be rejected because their commitment to the ingroup is not perceived to be firm enough by its highly identified elite members. One way in which a lack of commitment to the group, or even disloyalty towards the group, might be expressed is by attempts to distance the self from the group when it has failed or performed badly (see chapters 3 and 6). Such distancing from the group when its value is brought into question by a loss, if it is observed by highly identified group members is quite likely to be diagnosed for what it is: an attempt to salvage the personal self at the expense of the group. Thus, the low identified, who tend to behave in a more self-interested fashion, are likely to be subjected to such rejection or even expulsion from the group by those whose commitment to it is strong.

One step more extreme in terms of likelihood of evoking the ire of and total rejection by highly identified group members is an ingroup member who brings into question the entire group's value (see Marques, Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1988). Such a 'black sheep', who is disloyal to the ingroup, is particularly likely to be derogated by the highly identified when the ingroup's value is suffering, such as when it has endured a defeat (Branscombe, Wann, Noel & Coleman, 1993). Obviously, such patterns of disloyalty to the group and derogation by the ingroup can become cyclical and reinforce each other.

To investigate such intragroup processes systematically, we orthogonally manipulated the respect that fellow ingroup members accorded the individual as well as the prestige of the ingroup in the eyes of the outgroup (Branscombe, Spears, Ellemers & Doosje, 1998; see also chapter 4, this volume). In this research we defined prestige as the status of the ingroup based on the view of it as held by a relevant outgroup (closely related to the notion of public collective self-esteem: see Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Respect refers to the individual group member's perceived status within the group according to other ingroup members (see also Smith & Tyler, 1997). As predicted, people who belonged to a devalued group displayed fundamentally different responses, depending on the extent to which they felt respected or rejected by their fellow ingroup members. Specifically, highly respected members of a devalued group were more likely to discriminate against

the outgroup when making intergroup allocations than were those accorded little respect by their fellow group members. Furthermore, they exhibited a greater willingness to work for and invest time in the group relative to their personal selves. Conversely, less respected members of a devalued group were significantly less inclined to invest in the group, and preferred to work for themselves. These differences were not evident in a group whose identity was not threatened by low prestige or standing, suggesting that the responses of respected group members were most consequential and necessary when the group suffered an external threat to its value (see the previous section on threats to value).

These results attest to the possibility that the group may antagonize its members by withholding respect from them, and the resulting disloyalty of the individuals in question provides further grounds for their rejection by the ingroup. In other words, when too little respect or too much rejection has been directed towards them, people may start to disidentify and feel little loyalty towards the ingroup. Consequently, they are the most likely to behave as a 'traitor' and switch camps when upward mobility is possible. When the rejecting ingroup is of a high status or if it cannot be easily replaced because it is basic in some important way for the individual's functioning, then adjustment following such rejection should be especially problematic (see Burris, Branscombe & Klar, 1997; Williams & Sommer, 1997). In fact, rejection by an important ingroup may be sufficiently difficult to adapt to psychologically that when individuals perceive themselves at risk for such treatment, they may display 'hyper-conformity' to perceived ingroup norms in an attempt to convince the ingroup that they are indeed loyal and want to retain their group membership.

Conclusions and Future Directions

In this chapter we have distinguished between four different types of social identity threat that can be experienced. We have summarized this taxonomy and the different effects that can be expected following induction of each sort in table 2.1. Furthermore, we have tried to illustrate how the nature of the threat depends on the social context in which it is encountered, and how the way in which people are likely to respond to each type of threat depends on the content of the social identity or the dimension of social comparison, and, above all, on the extent to which individuals feel committed to the group. For some types of social identity threat, those who are highly identified are most likely to show defensive responses (e.g., when the group's identity is not distinct, or when they face the possibility of rejection by the ingroup). However, the greatest responsiveness to other forms of social identity threat (such as the threat of being categorized against one's will) is likely to be observed among low-identified group members. With other forms of identity threat, such as threat to the group's value, reactions of high and low identifiers may be equally defensive but responses may take different and quite

these different classes of threat. Commitment, or degree of identification, is per-

and meas

opposite forms, with low identifiers distancing themselves from the group or repenting for its immoral behaviour, and high identifiers closing ranks and either symbolically or physically striking back at the group they perceive as representing the threat. Thus, social identity threat is not the sole province of those who are highly identified with a group. Rather, what is experienced as threatening and how it is responded to varies by level of group identification.

In addition to affecting their coping responses to identity threat, we argue that the content of the threat may vary depending on the way people define their social identity in a particular social context. For instance, a group that is generally devalued in the social structure at large may be perceived in a positive way by its members, perhaps because it accords them with a distinct identity, as is the case of alternative cultural identities such as can be found among body-piercers, for example. Alternatively, what is considered a valued identity may be culture-specific, as was illustrated in a study by Levy and Langer (1994). When they compared how Chinese and American research participants were affected by cultural stereotypes about ageing, the responses of older people depended on the evaluation of their group in the larger society. Specifically, the memory performance of older people in China (where 'elderly' is a positive identity) was superior to that of American elderly (who are confronted with a negative group identity).

We have further illustrated that a similar response to threat, namely outgroup derogation, can occur for a variety of reasons (see table 2.1). Evidence in support of the most intuitively plausible possibility, where it is displayed in retaliation for a direct or indirect negative comparative evaluation between the ingroup and the outgroup, was discussed. However, outgroup derogation can occur for other reasons as well. It can be the result of a public self-presentational strategy designed to impress powerful ingroup members on the part of peripheral group members seeking admittance to the group or by ingroup members who fear expulsion. In this case it reflects a willingness to conform to perceived ingroup norms to gain approval, with outgroup derogation being the most obvious way of achieving this goal. It can also result from a lack of distinctness or distinctiveness for a group's identity, especially when no other means of meaningful differentiation are available, as is typical in studies employing the 'minimal groups' paradigm.

In order to understand fully the possible implications of the different types of threat, the taxonomic scheme presented in this chapter and summarized in table 2.1 must be further developed and refined. First, there may be other distinct classes of threat not covered here that are relevant to the understanding of psychological reactions and behaviour in intergroup contexts. Second, further work is necessary to evaluate the importance of variations in context, content and commitment for these different classes of threat. Commitment, or degree of identification, is perhaps the theme that has attracted the most attention from researchers, forming a recurring motif in the research we reviewed. The context in which the threat occurs covers a range of factors, including the frame of reference (intragroup versus intergroup comparison) and the degree of salience of different identity levels that is likely to be evoked (personal versus group), amongst other factors.

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This, too, has been the subject of much research, and the consequences of the combination of context and commitment have been an explicit theme in some of our own research in terms of both social perception (see chapter 3) and behaviour (see chapter 4). Perhaps the most fruitful direction for additional research is the issue of 'content' and how the content of social identity and group norms can be crucial to the sorts of response to identity threat that are likely to be exhibited (see, in particular, chapters 6, 8 and 10). In the present scheme we have only explicitly considered the content in relation to threats to group value (competence versus morality), but it is doubtless relevant to other classes of threat as well. In relation to group distinctiveness, we touched briefly on the importance of content in en-dowing us with a distinct identity and the possibility that differences in the con-tent of group identity can sometimes provide the solution to group distinctiveness in the context of multidimensional comparisons, eliminating the need for more overt discrimination. Currently, we are engaged in research that examines the consequences of respect from fellow ingroup members in terms of the impact of differences in content (competence-based versus liking-based respect) for intergroup behaviour.

This scheme could also be conceptually extended by developing a taxonomy of groups and the ways in which these can vary, along with their implications for how reactions to identity threat might be moderated. Important factors that have not yet been sufficiently considered in systematic research include: (a) the control-lability of inclusion (e.g., the visibility of group membership, see Frable, 1993); (b) whether the social identity itself is voluntary (self-selected) or is involuntary (as-signed); (c) whether the group identity is long or short term and based on agreed-upon performance criteria, with the possibility that the position of the groups varies over time; (d) whether group members interact in face-to-face settings or are simply members of a social category; and (e) whether there is strong and widespread consensual devaluation of a group identity or whether its value is contextually dependent, with only some subgroups within the broader culture likely to evaluate the identity negatively. These factors are often correlated in real social groups, and there is considerable ambiguity about which are exerting the most crucial effects. In order to address these questions and assess their independ-ent effects on intergroup behaviour they must be disentangled experimentally.

These kinds of conceptual issue are made all the more difficult by the methodo-logical and measurement problems that plague the study of identity threat and its consequences. As we hinted at the beginning of this chapter, identity threat is a complex construct that can involve multiple meanings, making measurement a thorny problem. Indeed, the methodological issues associated with manipulation and measurement of threat may well require a chapter of their own. While we have not addressed these issues directly here, we see the problems involved in the study of threat as difficult to underestimate. Often it is difficult to obtain direct 'manipulation checks' of threat without revealing the real purpose of the manipu-lation itself and thereby undermining reactions to the critical dependent measures in the process. One well-known reaction to threat evident since the earliest psy-

chodynamic treatises involves denying its presence or impact. This possibility makes it even more necessary, therefore, that we employ multiple methods, including those that are more 'direct' but less obtrusive or reactive (e.g., reaction-time data and physiological responses). Between-subjects treatments or even separate studies may be required to evaluate fully the impact of threat manipulations, if we are to convince critical consumers of the evidence concerning the operation of psychological processes as mediators of socially relevant outcomes (see Bettencourt, Miller & Hume, in press). Although the identity threat effects that we have presented here are interpretable and do make good sense in terms of the theoretical frameworks provided by social identity and self-categorization theories in particular, the richness of these grand theories may be seen by some as a weakness. Thus, attention to the measurement and methodological issues, in addition to theoretical developments, should be a priority in future empirical work.

In addition, an important direction for future research should be investigation of the consequences of exposure to longer-term threats to social identity than those examined thus far. Much of the existing literature concerns responses to immediate or temporary threats to identity, although some of the groups that have been studied (e.g African Americans, women) are subjected to long-term identity threat in society. With the exception of Breakwell's (1986) work on the consequences of loss of the ability to claim a valued identity (e.g., the movement from employed person to unemployed) and the addition or loss of major identities over the life-span (e.g., marriage, divorce, illness or criminal victimization), little is known about the options available to different types of people as they adjust to such social identity revisions and changes. Furthermore, when people might perceive a dimension in terms of a group membership or when they might perceive it as a feature of their personal selves requires additional theoretical and empirical work. As Simon (1997) has noted, any attribute or dimension can be used as the basis for group self-categorization or individual self-categorization. Under what circumstances people will move, in either direction, from conceptualizing themselves in group membership terms (e.g., as a member of one age group or another; as a member of the group 'healthy people' versus the group 'cancer patients') to personal identity terms, where those are simply individual attributes of the self, should be an important focus of further empirical investigation. It is unlikely to be the attribute itself that is critical; rather, some social contexts are likely to push towards one conceptualization of the self over another, and which level of identity is operating will have critical implications for how threats to identity are managed. The present chapter at least attempts to provide a heuristic framework in which the different faces of threat to social identity in intergroup contexts can be conceptualized and understood.